

Petitions

Staffordshire County Council wants to hear from people who live, work and study in the area about the things that matter to them. We welcome petitions which are one way for people to let us know their concerns. We will acknowledge all petitions sent or presented to the council within 10 working days of receipt. This acknowledgement will set out what we plan to do in response to the petition. We will treat something as a petition if it says it is a petition, or if it seems to us that it is meant to be one.

You can send paper petitions to:

Duncan Whitehouse, Head of Scrutiny and Support
Member and Democratic Services
Staffordshire County Council
Wedgwood Building
Tipping Street
Stafford
ST16 2DH

Or create, sign and submit a petition online by following this link
<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/doitonline/haveyoursay/> .

Or contact Duncan Whitehouse, Head of Scrutiny and Support, on 01785 276154 to make arrangements to hand a petition in.

Petitions can also be presented to a meeting of the full council. These meetings take place at least six times a year, dates and times can be found here <http://moderngov.staffordshire.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=124> . If you would like to present your petition to the council, or would like your councillor or someone else to present it on your behalf, please contact Duncan Whitehouse, Head of Scrutiny and Support, on 01785 276154 at least 10 working days before the meeting and an officer will talk you through the process.

What are the guidelines for submitting a petition?

Petitions submitted to the council must include:

- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition - it should state what action the petitioners wish the council to take (or stop taking)
- the name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition.

Petitions should be accompanied by contact details, including an address, for the petition organiser. This is the person we will contact to explain what we will do in

response to the petition. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact signatories to the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser.

Please tell us if the petition has been sent to anyone else as well as the County Council.

Petitions which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate are not acceptable.

What will the council do when it receives my petition?

An acknowledgement will be sent to the petition organiser within 10 working days of receiving the petition. It will explain what we plan to do in response to the petition and if and when they can expect to hear from us again. The acknowledgement will also be published on our website. The contact details of the petition organiser will not be published.

If we can do what your petition asks for, the acknowledgement may confirm our response that we will do this and the petition will be closed.

If the subject raised by the petition needs more investigation, we will tell you the steps we plan to take to do this, how you may be involved and when you can expect a final response.

If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a council debate (5,000 signatures), or a senior officer giving evidence (2,500 signatures), then the acknowledgment will confirm this and tell you when and where the meeting will take place and how you may be involved.

If the petition applies to a planning application, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an elected mayor), or on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, other procedures apply. Further information on all these procedures and how you can express your views is available on the council's website.

In the period immediately before an election or referendum we may need to deal with your petition differently – if this is the case we will explain the reasons and discuss the revised timescale which will apply.

If a petition does not follow the guidelines, the council may decide not to do anything further with it. In this case, we will write to you to explain the reasons.

So that people know what we are doing in response to the petitions we receive the details of all the petitions submitted to us will be published on our website, together with the acknowledgement and notification of the response, except in

cases where this would be inappropriate. Whenever possible we will also publish all correspondence relating to the petition (all personal details will be removed).

How will the council respond to petitions?

Our response to a petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it, but the steps we take in response may include one or more of the following:

- considering the petition at a council meeting
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the council's overview and scrutiny committee*
- calling a referendum

leading to writing to the petition organiser:

- setting out our views about the request in the petition
- explaining that we will take the action requested in the petition
- explaining why we will not take the action requested in the petition
- explaining what action we will take, if any, in response to the subject raised by the petition
- giving advice about how the subject raised by the petition might be pursued.

*Overview and scrutiny committees are committees of councillors who are responsible for scrutinising the work of the council and some partners – in other words, the overview and scrutiny committee has the power to hold the council's decision makers and some partners to account. You can find out more about our decision making and scrutiny arrangements by following this link <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/yourcouncil/decisionmakingcouncil/> .

The council will consider all the specific actions it could take on the subject raised by a petition. If your petition is about something over which the council has no direct control (for example the local railway or hospital) we will consider making representations on behalf of the community to the relevant body. The council works with a large number of local partners and where possible will work with these partners to respond to your petition. If we are not able to do this for any reason, then we will explain this to you. You can find more information on the services for which the council is responsible on our website.

If your petition is about something that a different council is responsible for we will give consideration to what the best method is for responding to it. This might consist of simply forwarding the petition to the other council, but could involve other steps. In any event, we will always notify you of the action we have taken.

Full council debates

If a petition contains more than 5,000 signatures it will be debated by the full council (unless it is a petition asking for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting). This means that the subject raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting which all County Councillors can attend. The council will usually consider the petition at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. We will let you know about the specific arrangements for the debate and how you may be involved. The council may decide the response to the petition at this meeting or suggest what other steps should be taken. Where the council executive has to make the final decision on the response to the petition, the council may make recommendations to inform this decision.

The petition organiser will be notified of the council's resolutions.

This notification will also be published on our website.

Officer evidence

Your petition may ask for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting about something for which the officer is responsible as part of their job. For example, your petition may ask a senior council officer to explain progress on an issue, or to explain the advice given to elected members to enable them to make a particular decision.

If your petition contains at least 2,500 signatures, the relevant senior officer will give evidence at a public meeting of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee. A list of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence can be found here [see annex]. You should be aware that the overview and scrutiny committee may decide that it would be more appropriate for another officer to give evidence instead of any officer named in the petition – for instance if the named officer has changed jobs. The committee may also decide to call the relevant councillor to attend the meeting. Committee members will ask the questions at this meeting, but we will let you know the specific arrangements for the meeting and how you may be involved. The overview and scrutiny committee will make a report on its findings which may include recommendations for action.

The petition organiser will be sent a copy of the overview and scrutiny committee's report. The report will also be published on our website.

E-petitions

The council welcomes e-petitions which are created and submitted through our website [<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/doitonline/haveyoursay/>]. E-petitions must follow the same guidelines as paper petitions.

The petition organiser will need to provide us with their name, postal address and email address. You will also need to decide how long you would like your petition to be open for signatures. Most petitions run for six months, but you can choose a shorter or longer timeframe, up to a maximum of 12 months.

When you create an e-petition, it may take five working days before it is published online. This is because we have to check that the content of your petition is suitable before it is made available for signature. If we feel we cannot publish your petition for some reason, we will contact you within this time to explain. You will be able to change and resubmit your petition if you wish. If you do not do this within 10 working days, a summary of the petition and the reason why it has not been accepted will be published under the 'rejected petitions' section of the website.

When an e-petition has closed for signature, it will automatically be submitted unless you would like to present it to a meeting of the council. If you would like to present your e-petition please contact Duncan Whitehouse, Head of Scrutiny and Support, on 01785 276154 in advance of the closure date. In the same way as a paper petition, you will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days.

A petition acknowledgement and response will be emailed to everyone who has signed the e-petition and elected to receive this information. The acknowledgment and response will also be published on this website. We will not send you anything which is not relevant to the e-petition you have signed, unless you choose to receive other emails from us.

How do I 'sign' an e-petition?

You can see all the e-petitions currently available for signature on the council's website.

When you sign an e-petition you will be asked to provide your name, your postcode and a valid email address. When you have submitted this information you will be sent an email to the email address you have provided. This email will include a link which you must click on in order to confirm the email address is valid. Once this step is complete your 'signature' will be added to the petition. People visiting the e-petition will be able to see your name in the list of those who have signed it but your contact details will not be visible.

What can I do if I feel my petition has not been dealt with properly?

If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser has the right to request a review of the steps that the council has taken in response to your petition. This will be undertaken by the Council's Corporate Review Committee, unless it has previously been involved in considering the petition in which case it will nominate another of the council's overview and scrutiny committees to undertake the review. It is helpful to everyone if the petition organiser gives a short explanation of the reasons why the steps the council has taken are not considered to be adequate.

The committee will usually consider your request at its next meeting, although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will take place at the following meeting. Should the committee determine that we have not dealt with your petition adequately, it may use any of its powers to deal with the matter. These powers include making recommendations to the council executive and arranging for the matter to be considered at a meeting of the full council.

Once the appeal has been considered the petition organiser will be informed of the results within 5 working days. The results of the review will also be published on our website.

Annex

List of the senior staff that can be called to give evidence

Nick Bell, Chief Executive

Andrew Burns, Finance Director

Richard Higgs, Corporate Director, Development Services Directorate

Sander Kristel, Director of Information and Communication Technology

Sally Rees, Corporate Director, Children Young People and Families Directorate

Helen Riley, Deputy Corporate Director, Communities and Chief Executive's Office

Eric Robinson, Corporate Director, Social Care and Health Directorate

John Tradewell, Director of Law and Governance